



Working Lands Alliance
A Project of American Farmland Trust

Date: March 10, 2010

To: Planning & Development Committee

Testimony in Support of: ***Raised Bill No. 199 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT***

Submitted by: Jiff Martin, Project Director, Working Lands Alliance

The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Working Lands Alliance, a statewide coalition of 200 businesses and non-profits as well as over 700 individuals committed to increasing the state's commitment to farmland preservation.

The Working Lands Alliance coalition supports including the concept of directing state resources toward developments that promote the principles of smart growth contained in Public Act 09-230 as an addition to RB 199.

Thirty years ago our state leaders enacted landmark legislation with passage of Public Act 78-232. With its passage, this legislation laid the groundwork for what is today known as the Connecticut Farmland Preservation Program. The main objective of the program is to secure a food and fiber producing land resource base for the future of agriculture in Connecticut. Connecticut has 4,916 farms and 406,000 acres of 'land in farms'.¹ The state goal is to protect 130,000 acres of farmland, including cropland and supportive lands such as forest and wetlands. So far the state has protected less than 37,000 acres on 265 farms.

With limited resources, the state's investment strategy should prioritize smart investments that reinvigorate our urban centers while preserving our state's rural character. A Smart Growth Ranking System that is applied uniformly across all agencies as well as special projects of the State Bond Commission would help focus resources on smart growth priorities, including conservation.

For a state program such as the CT Farmland Preservation Program -- which uses a rigorous selection and review process to prioritize farms to expend lump sums of bonding periodically allocated to the program -- it would be reasonable for the agency to apply a Smart Growth Ranking Score consistent with the principles of smart growth defined in Section 1 of PA 09-230 to each farm project at the time of closing in order to illustrate for public review the high ranking of these investments. The state's purchase of development rights on farmland demands a certain degree of privacy for the landowner during the 1-2 years of application process, negotiation, appraisal, survey, and approval by the State Property Review Board, however WLA feels it would be helpful if the public could examine over time the quality of these investments as they compare to other investments by the state.

¹ USDA 2007 Census of Agriculture